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12 February 1976

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: 25th Party Congress

The 25th Party Congress is expected to reconfirm Brezhnev and the core of leaders around him in their positions and to maintain the basic outlines of their present policies. Shifts among second-echelon leaders, as well as some innovations in domestic programs, are possible. They could offer some clues as to how policy and the succession problem may develop in the post-Congress period.

The Leaders

Brezhnev appears secure and determined to continue in office. The policy disappointments at home and abroad over the past year and a half have not seriously damaged his status or led to open debate among the leadership. Brezhnev's health and stamina, which deteriorating considerably over the past two years, have stabilized in recent months, and he is able to function effectively,

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albeit at a reduced pace. Rumor and speculation--some from Soviet officials--that Brezhnev would soon retire have abated, especially since the announcement in December that he would deliver the main report to the Congress. At the republic congresses now under way, Brezhnev is being accorded a full portion of praise and honor.

Major changes in the rest of the leadership are also unlikely. A congress is not the usual occasion for a high-level shake-up. The status quo continues to serve the interests of the senior and dominant members of the Politburo. The small turn-over of officials with Central Committee status elected at the local and republic party meetings preceding the Congress suggests considerable harmony, and ultimately continued stability, at the top.

The leadership is likely to make some adjustments in its membership at the secondary level. No one was dropped from the Politburo at the last congress, but four leaders were advanced to full membership, adding to Brezhnev's support on that body. Today, RSFSR Premier Solomentsev and Leningrad party boss Romanov are among leaders who have some claim to similar promotions. Departures are also possible. Arvid Pelshe, 77 and not influential, may retire honorably. The leadership has avoided

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recriminations over the harvest disaster, but it still may offer up someone--perhaps Agricultural Minister Polyansky--as a scapegoat.

If a top leader should go, Kosygin may be the most likely. Periodically, reports have circulated that he would like to retire. His health has been indifferent recently." Over the years his governmental apparatus has suffered attacks and incursions from the party, including Brezhnev, and reports of criticism cropped up again in December. Moreover, he is the only top leader who has an obvious successor, First Deputy Premier Mazurov. Even these considerations, however, point only to a possibility, not to a probability, of retirement.

Policies

The Congress will reaffirm the basis foreign and domestic policies pursued by the leadership since the last Congress. In his report, however, Brezhnev will have to take into account some policy disappointments, different shades of opinion among the leadership on certain issues, and doubtful or reduced prospects in many fields.

Foreign Policy

There seems little reason to doubt that the 25th Congress will reconfirm the CPSU's dedication to the

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peace program outlined five years ago. While the USSR's foreign policy line is not seriously in question, the tone as well as the specifics of Brezhnev's report to the Congress will probably convey, perhaps between the lines, the optimistic but not euphoric attitude the Soviets feel about the fruits of their foreign policy. At the end of the foreign policy section of his 1971 report Brezhnev stated:

We have not everywhere advanced toward our outlined goals as swiftly as we might have wished. A number of important actions have not yet been brought to completion...But the overall balance is obvious: Great results have been achieved in these five years. Our homeland's international position has become still stronger, its prestige has grown, and the...Soviet people reliably safeguarded.

Brezhnev is likely to say much the same this year, and he and the vast majority of his audience will think the words true. The Soviet Union in 1976 is a more powerful, active participant in world affairs than it was five years ago. Its strategic and conventional military capability relative to the US and the West is stronger than it was five years ago and, just as important, it is

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widely perceived to be so. The bottom line looks good.

Brezhnev is also likely to find good things to say about disarmament--a subject which loomed large in the "concrete tasks" set forth in his 24th Congress report. Clearly a SALT II agreement would have been a big help, but Brezhnev will still be able to point with pride to SALT I and the other agreements that were reached with the US in 1972. He will come out for a new SALT agreement and may put in a word in favor of future reductions and the banning of new weapons of mass destruction. He will probably take note of the fact that MBFR negotiations have begun since the 24th Congress, and call for more rapid progress in those talks.

The treatment of the US relationship was muted in the 1971 report, and while it is likely to get more attention this year, the tone will probably not be effusive. The problems of SALT II, MFN, credits, and Angola have helped create an atmosphere that would make it very difficult for Brezhnev, even if he were so inclined, to give a strongly positive cast to the US relationship. At the same time, it also seems likely that Brezhnev will want to avoid giving any signal--particularly in a US election year--that the USSR is not interested in getting detente with the US back on the tracks.

Brezhnev will probably be positive on Moscow's progress vis-a-vis West Europe. He can point to the Berlin quadripartite agreement, the treaty with the FRG, and expanding economic relations with Bonn, Paris and London as concrete evidence of the progress the Soviet Union has made toward achieving the tasks set out in the 24th Congress. Pride of place is likely to go to CSCE, which will be portrayed as a major achievement, despite the reservations that we know the Soviets have.

China may be a problem. In the past week or so Moscow has been unusually harsh in its treatment of Peking; this could be a warm-up for a blast at the congress. But there is also a possibility that the Soviets are only reacting in a tactical way to what has been coming out of Peking since the unusually tough People's Daily editorial on New Year's Day. At the 24th Congress, Brezhnev treated China with remarkable forbearance given the fact that the border fighting was less than two years away. So there is a precedent for a light touch on this visceral issue. One argument in favor of such an approach this year is the recent leadership changes in Peking. The Soviets are not optimistic, but they might see some potential advantage in striking a moderate pose so as either to encourage

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"pro-Soviet" elements in China or, at least, to avoid giving additional ammunition to Moscow's enemies there.

Brezhnev may well give somewhat more emphasis in the 25th Congress report to Moscow's support for the "struggle against imperialism" and for national liberation movements. Communist successes in Vietnam and Angola will be prominent, not only because they are "successes," but because Brezhnev will be seeking to underline the point that detente has not been an impediment to the Soviet Union carrying out its international socialist duty. His intended audience will be the US as well as his party colleagues. He may also be inclined to lean forward in this area in order to breath life into the idea that the Soviet Union does have a leadership role in the world communist movement. In the back of his mind, or that of his report's drafters, is the increased schismatic tendencies among the West European parties. Brezhnev will be doing his best, probably without confronting the issue directly, to arrest this independent movement, or at least to soften its impact, by emphasizing those cases where the Soviet Union can lay claim to having exercised leadership.

The Economy

Most of Brezhnev's ambitious plans to put his stamp on the country's future at this Congress will come to

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naught. A long-term economic plan (1976-90) and a new constitution, which he promised for the Congress, are evidently far from ready. Controversial and complex issues have also prevented much progress in response to Brezhnev's calls for a comprehensive reorganization and rationalization of agricultural and industrial management.

The leadership will try to gloss over present economic difficulties and to retain the verbal commitment to a consumer program that has for the time being lost much of its substance. Quality and efficiency will be stressed over economic growth. Besides calling for more discipline and socialist competition, Brezhnev may be tempted to launch some modest management reorganization proposals for agriculture or industry to create a more convincing image of initiative and leadership in these areas. In the ideological sphere, he will convey the message that detente and the CSCE agreements do not mean a slackening of the ideological struggle or of internal controls and discipline.

The Succession Problem

Although Brezhnev will remain at the helm, the Congress proceedings may give some indication that the leadership is beginning to address the problem of succession. Brezhnev has so far made no moves to establish an long-term

successor, and most present candidates lack a good claim to his mantle. Shifts among junior leaders--for example, enhancing party secretary Kulakov's status or bringing Ukrainian party chief Shcherbitsky to Moscow--could signal that succession maneuvering has begun and who might be a front-runner.